

REWIND

The Story Behind The Song

Radiohead: (from left) Ed O'Brien, Phil Selway, Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood, Colin Greenwood.



#11 Radiohead's **CREEP**

The one that made them. And also enticed them to "suck Satan's cock".

THE SONG THAT jump-started Radiohead's career, Creep transformed them from just another struggling indie band into reluctant global stars. Its universal themes of obsession and self-loathing chimed with grunge's introspective angst, but the band's love/hate relationship with the song would see them spend the rest of the decade trying to live it down.

WRITING

In October 1988, Thom Yorke arrived at Exeter to study Fine Art and English. On a Friday, the band he formed in Oxford with schoolfriend Colin Greenwood, had been put on ice (though they would reconvene for one-off gigs whenever Yorke came back during the holidays).

He was far from idle during his three-year stint at Exeter. As well as putting together two bands (the ramshackle Headless Chickens and the dancier Flicker Noise), Yorke continued to write songs and post them to Greenwood. One was a claustrophobic track called Creep.

"Thom sent me an acoustic version," says Greenwood. "I listened to it and said, This is what I want to do. This is my destiny."

Yorke based the lyrics on first-hand experience. Lines such as "You're just like an angel/Your skin makes me cry" were inspired by an unrequited crush the singer had on an unnamed girl he met while drinking in the moneyed bars of Oxford's swanky Little Clarendon Street. (He would later regret revealing that it was about a real person — "She wasn't even that nice," he sniffed).

After Yorke graduated in 1991, he returned to Oxford and re-formed On a Friday. Within six months, the band had bagged an eight-album deal with Parlophone. At the insistence of the label, they changed their name to Radiohead (after a track from Yorke favourites Talking Heads' 1986 album True Stories).

Their first release was the unremarkable, indie-by-numbers Drill EP. Produced by manager Chris Hufford, it limped to a lowly Number 101 in the charts in May 1992. To oversee the follow-up, Parlophone hired American duo Paul Q Kolderie and Sean Slade, previously producers to Dinosaur Jr and Throwing Muses.

Kolderie and Slade met the band in their rehearsal room on the outskirts of Oxford to hear them run through candidates for the next single. The label were keen to go with the Pixies-style guitar blast of Inside My Head. Also under consideration were the brooding Lurgee and the punkier Million Dollar Question.

"We didn't like these songs Parlophone had chosen, and I don't think the band did," recalls Kolderie. "We were rather disappointed."

Dispirited, the band launched into a slow-burning version of Creep.

Thom Yorke and Jonny Greenwood, Chipping Norton Studios, April 1992.



'JONNY DELIBERATELY TRIED TO FUCK IT UP.'

"That's our Scott Walker song," muttered Yorke after they'd finished. Kolderie and Slade assumed it was a cover of a track by the '60s star.

"Now, I was familiar with Scott Walker, but there's a lot of albums and I could've missed something," says Kolderie. "We walked out of the rehearsal and Sean said, Too bad their best song is a cover."

RECORDING

Despite their reservations, Kolderie and Slade agreed to produce Radiohead's second single and debut album Pablo Honey. Sessions at Chipping Norton Studios, near Oxford, in April 1992 were frustrating.

"It occurred to us that the band were trying to see what we could do with their weaker material," recalls Kolderie. "But because nobody was really inspired by it, we got bogged down in the recording."

To help them loosen up, Kolderie and Slade suggested they run through "the Scott Walker song". It was only then that the producers were told that it was a Radiohead original. Impressed, they sneakily recorded the band as they played it.

"When we recorded it, we didn't even know it was being taped," says drummer Phil Selway. "The reason it sounds so powerful is because it's completely unself-conscious."

Ironically, Creep's most memorable moment was a deliberate act of sabotage. Lead guitarist Jonny Greenwood hated the song and sulkily stamped on his effects pedal in the build-up to the chorus. The result was

a belligerent stutter of noise.

"The guitar clunk is Jonny trying to fuck it up," says guitarist Ed O'Brien. "He really didn't like it, so he tried spoiling it. But it made the song."

Bristling with pent-up frustration, the impromptu run-through was perfect as a backing track. There were still a few finishing touches to be added, though some of these proved troublesome. It took Jonny Greenwood 12 attempts to recreate his guitar clunk. There were also problems with the lyrics.

"The original words weren't too happening," says Kolderie. "Something about a leg of lamb. I said to Thom, You've got to try it again. At first he said, No, no, it's too late. But then he got this weird look on his face and went away for 20 minutes. Then he had it."

EPILOGUE

Presented with Creep, Parlophone agreed to release it as a single (Inside My Head would be relegated to the B-side). It peaked at Number 78 in September 1992.

Luckily, US radio began to pick up on the track. The band embarked on a gruelling Stateside promo trip, which included "I'm A Creep" radio contests, in which the most self-loathing fans won T-shirts, plus an appearance on MTV's Beach House Party with bikini-clad girls. "We sucked Satan's cock," spat Yorke.

Despite their growing resentment, Creep reached Number 34 in the US charts. A UK re-release followed and it hit Number 7 in September 1993.

Predictably, they grew to hate the song. By mid-'98, it had been dropped from their live set. It was resurrected at a show at Oxford's South Park in July 2001, though they have played it just 12 times since.

SLEEVE NOTES

Written by: Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood, Colin Greenwood, Ed O'Brien, Phil Selway.

Performers: Yorke (vocals, guitar), Jonny Greenwood (guitar), O'Brien (guitar), Colin Greenwood (bass), Selway (drums)

Recorded at: Chipping Norton Studios, Oxford, April 1992.

Producers: Paul Q Kolderie and Sean Slade.

Released: 9 September 1992; re-released 6 September 1993.

Highest UK chart placing: 7

Available on: Pablo Honey (Parlophone)

